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AUTHOR Haver, Susan Goetz
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of teachers' "sensemaking" about changing professional relationships and inclusive education involved interviews and observations of three teachers over the course of a school year. The teachers, one each from regular and special education and a "collaborating teacher," were employed in an urban upper elementary school in the midst of restructuring for inclusion of children with mild disabilities into regular classrooms. Teachers were observed for 2 days a week and the special education collaborative teacher was "shadowed" through her work day four times. Both individual and collective interviews were conducted with the teachers as well as with the school principal. The study found both patterns and contradictions in the teachers' sense of what they were undertaking. Conflicting understandings about their teaching purposes were indicated by their different uses of time, space, and curriculum. Organizational and personal obstacles to communication were also found. The paper has many excerpts from interviews as well as classroom vignettes from the observations. Suggestions for more effective collaboration are offered. (DB)

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Stories of the Classroom: Teachers Make Sense of Inclusion

Susan Goetz Haver

New York University

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Abstract

This paper describes a qualitative study of teachers' sensemaking, particularly about changing professional relationships. The site was an urban upper elementary school in the midst of restructuring for inclusion of mildly disabled children in regular classrooms. Two classroom teachers, 1 each from regular and special education , and a "collaborating teacher" were observed and interviewed during a school year. The paper examines patterns and contradictions in the teachers' sense of what they were undertaking. Conflicting understandings about their teaching purposes surface in their use of time, space, and curriculum. Organizational and personal obstacles to communication emerge, suggesting possible directions for more effective collaboration.

Introduction

"Inclusion," a trend toward placing children with disabilities in regular classrooms, emerges from a variety of interests. It has grown out of advocacy for civil and human rights. This includes litigation brought by parents of children with disabilities, or by agencies acting in their behalf. Some compare a separate system of segregation to a policy of "separate but equal", and suggest that such a policy contributes to discrimination against people with disabilities in the wider society. They urge that schools be a place where a more inclusive, democratic society can be learned, and where nondisabled students can come to interact with others as peers and coworkers. Inclusion also emerges from critiques of the current special education structures and outcomes, and the economic hardship engendered by increasing costs of special class programs and supporting services. There are a number of questions arising about the way in which children are determined to be eligible for special services, and the ability of such a system to be monitored.

Advocates of the trend describe new ways in which the classroom teacher's work will be supported by collaborating specialists, through the restructuring of special education (Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback, 1992). There is conflicting advocacy from teachers' groups, notably the American Federation of Teachers, to slow or stop the adoption of inclusion as a policy (New York Teacher, April 18, 1994). This resistance arises from the fear that teachers will be overburdened by additional responsibilities for which they are not adequately prepared, distrust of promises of support arising from economic scarcity and general lack of trust in school systems' good faith. As standards for teachers' work are rising

(e.g.; the demand for "higher" curriculum standards), integrating children who have a history of difficulty succeeding with those already in place can seem like an impossible task.

Another tension is created by the growing focus on teacher's agency in their own lives. Teachers are developing a more powerful voice in the substance of their professional work, as well as in the conditions of that work. One of the most significant sources of teachers' professional success lies in the complex interdependency of teacher and student, the human interactions of the classroom. Whatever supports are put into place, inclusion is likely to have a profound impact on the equilibrium of these interactions. There may or may not be any corresponding freedom or support for changing the classroom (curriculum, flexible scheduling, assessment practices, planning) in ways that would maximize positive responsiveness. If there is such freedom, there is no clear agreement on what kinds of changes are most useful, and how a teacher might go about making them.

Research Problem

There is so much passionate advocacy, on both sides of the question, that it is difficult to know what adopting such a policy might mean to a classroom teacher. While the day-to-day realities of the classroom are affected by public perceptions of inclusion, disability, teaching competence, etc., the ways in which teachers integrate these ideas and contextualize them are largely unknown. How might inclusion, for example, influence the way the teacher understands his or her job? How is inclusion affected by the daily choices made by the teacher? What relationship do these questions have to the culture of the school, or to the groups with which the teacher identifies? How does the teacher make sense of inclusion in the context of a particular professional history and experience of school?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which inclusion might change the working lives of classroom teachers, and to explore how teachers make sense of these changes. In this paper, I am particularly concerned with the meanings related to changing professional relationships. I chose a symbolic interactionist framework in order to concentrate on how these meanings and choices interact within the school.

Conceptual Framework

A policy of inclusion would, at the very least, alter the composition of the group with which the teacher must interact responsibly. In order to understand how the nature of the teacher's work would change, it is useful to explore the meanings of the interactions in an inclusive classroom.

How does a teacher think about his/her relationships with the students in the class? In what ways, if any, does this process change when the membership of the group expands? Does the process of inclusion introduce new meanings into the classroom, or change old ones (such as success, ownership, difference, expertise, or support, for example) in significant ways? Hargreaves (1994) wrote of the way in which the expansion of teachers' jobs can be thought of as "professionalization," an increase in teacher agency, power and status, or "intensification," a kind of exploitation which can minimize the control teachers have over their professional lives. What is the task that the policymakers are asking of teachers, and how do teachers define it? Are there ways to intervene usefully in this process?

Blumer (1969), in his discussion of symbolic interactionism, asserted that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them"(p.2). People do not merely react to static concepts; they are continuously interpreting the people, events, and ideas

they encounter. Their actions, in turn, are interpreted by those who deal with them. The meaning of inclusion, therefore, will be constructed, modified, and re-shaped in the inclusive classroom.

Blumer described the processes by which members of a group align their interpretations and individual actions into joint action. He calls these processes interlinkage, and offers several types that are useful for a study of classroom reality. The first interlinkage is that of the separate acts of the participants. A classroom, for example, may consist of a group of children working at various tables. In order for this to occur, each child must separately perform the act of working; it is their collective agreement to do this that allows the class to function as a whole. When individuals make decisions that break away from the collective decision of the group (a child who refuses to work, who runs around the room, for example) the interlinkage is incomplete or threatened. Chaos looms. The teacher may deal with the dissenter by attempting to change his action, removing him, or redefining the collective action so that it can absorb the variation.

A second kind of interlinkage is that arising from the connection of this action to those other actions on which the group is dependent, or interdependent. Classroom actions may align themselves with those of other classrooms in a school, with professional groups, with student subcultures, with communities of identification such as one's ethnic or religious group, "regular" or "special" education affiliations, as well as other administrative and political actions.

A third aspect of interlinkage is that any joint action arises out of a context of previous actions of the participants. Children and teachers have personal histories, histories with this or other schools, and histories of relationship with one another, in pairs, groups, or as an entire class. Any of these may loom large in the interpretation of specific events and classroom relations.

Procedures

I chose a qualitative methodology in order to understand the meanings that are shaped over time, and to allow for meanings and issues that I did not expect. I wanted to see what issues the teachers thought important, and what emerged in the classroom. It was important that I spend a prolonged period in the school. I became a part of each classroom, experienced its spatial arrangements, rhythms of time and season, and observed first-hand events that occurred during the teacher's day.

The Lincoln School

I chose to undertake a qualitative study of two classroom teachers and a teacher leader in The Lincoln School, an urban public elementary school. The school serves roughly 500 children in grades three through six. At the time of my research, Lincoln was in the third year of a restructuring effort designed to integrate mildly disabled children from special education into the regular classes. Unlike some other inclusion efforts in the city, this effort involved very little outside funding. The school reorganized its existing resources, adding only the position of collaborating teacher. Special education classes (called MIS I classes) had been dissolved, and the children assigned to those classes were redistributed among the third grade classes during the first year. Each new class was composed of fifteen -nineteen children, about three of whom were formerly in self-contained special education classes. The special education teacher was added to the pool of third grade teachers, and taught one of these new inclusive classes as well. Another teacher from special education (who had originally initiated this model) was designated :collaborating teacher". It was to be her job to work with classroom teachers in order to facilitate the integration. Each year a new grade was phased into the model, until the entire school would participate.

Data Generation and Analysis

I worked with two third grade teachers, Martha Wallace and Beth Mosco. Both had been teaching for over twenty years, and were in their third year of inclusion. Martha Wallace was a regular elementary teacher, with experience mostly in third and fourth grade. Beth Mosco began her career as an art teacher, then later became a special education teacher. Her experience in this school before inclusion was solely as a teacher in a self-contained special education class which was part of a three-class unit within the school.

I also worked with Gina Miller, the teacher leader largely responsible for the inclusion model. Gina had been a special education teacher from the same unit as Beth. The funding for her current position was the only additional cost created by the restructuring.

Two days a week for an entire school semester, I observed in Martha' s and Beth's classrooms, splitting the time equally between the two classes. Twice during this semester, and twice two months later, I "shadowed" Gina through her work day. I interviewed each of the three teachers in November and February for 1 1/2 to 2 hours after school, and all of them together at an extended lunch period in June. I also interviewed the principal, Theresa Monroe, for an hour in December..

I've analyzed the resulting data in a number of forms:

1. Observed classroom and school **patterns** in such things as use of time and space, assumptions about knowledge and how learning takes place, expectations of who may participate in various events, and why, common and divergent purposes

2. **Stories**, from my own observation, in which these patterns emerge sharply. Some of these stories illustrate the teachers' themes drawn from the interviews; others appear to be in conflict with them.

3. **Themes** from the teachers interviews. These interviews cover the teachers' professional histories, their goals for their work

and for themselves, relationships with colleagues, leaders and students, thoughts about curriculum, perceptions of the inclusion model and how it came to be implemented, thoughts about decision-making, their needs and struggles as teachers, and as teachers implementing inclusion, metaphors for their profession.

4. **Stories**, where offered, from the teachers' interviews, that illustrate their thinking about these issues.

5. **Comparison** of the themes and stories from one participant to the next. Some themes , such as autonomy, appeared to be common to those identified with special education in the school, for example. Others, such as invisibility, seemed to reappear as a value for Martha, but not for Beth and Gina. Sometimes assumptions seemed confirmed in one setting, but were contradicted in another, as in a child's ability to participate in an activity. Some emerged in both the teachers professional context and in the classroom, so that a teacher forced to sit quietly in staff meetings that had nothing to do with her teaching tasks allowed children to sit in her classroom with no way to participate, finding no means or need to do something about it.

The Teachers' Stories

In this section, I will describe some of the issues that arose as teachers talked about the inclusion model, and enacted it in their teaching practice. I begin with Gina Miller, who assumed a leadership role that had no formal precedent in the school. She describes how she developed the model, and what has arisen as she has attempted new forms of collaboration. Martha Wallace, the third grade teacher, struggles with a growing gap between what she would like to see happening in her classroom, and her perceived ability to achieve it. Beth Mosco, the special education teacher who became a third grade teacher, faces a new accountability structure that makes no sense to her. She talks about new conflicts between her creative autonomy and her personal need for connection and professional interaction.

Gina: Holding Back the Flood

The idea evolved out of my disgust with special education. And my disgust with the public school system, having come here after ten years in private school. I saw the very shocking realities. And that's really what began to make me think about how the situations were not what I thought was working for kids. Or for teachers. And so I immediately wrote a letter to just about everybody. I sent the same letter to the New York Board of Regents, to, Higher Education, the governor, the mayor, the Board

> of Ed, everybody. So it really started fourteen years ago to be, something I wanted to happen.
>
> In that letter, I traced the schooling of a mythical child.. And I gave a description of what the schooling was like for that child in a private setting, a child with disabilities, and what that result seems to be after several years., and I described what that schooling was like for a child with disabilities in public school setting and what and what that result seems to be after several years..
>
> The difference was that by the time a child with special needs reached the fifth or sixth grade in a private setting, they had skills. They could read, they could go on to junior high school or high school and expect to do well. And in fact, over the years I have run into the parents of students who were learning disabled, who I had in the private school setting, who were either in college at that point or graduating from college.
>
> And the results for children in the public schools are that they continue being in special ed, they continue on into junior high and high school and they don't get a diploma, most of them. So that was a very stark difference, the difference between no diploma and going to college.

This thought sat with Gina for fourteen years, until one day her special education supervisor approached her, saying there was some money (unspecified amount) available. He asked her for proposals for what she would like to do with it. Gina wrote a series of proposals with various "price tags", and received a positive response from the district on integration. Her supervisor gave her some help in developing the proposal, and a consultant was brought in who met with *special education* teachers, then wrote the plan over the summer. The plan was presented to regular grade teachers with a choice, as Martha remembers: *Choose* to sign on now, or wait to have it mandated next year. The third grade teachers signed on, largely enticed by the reduced class size in the new model. Gina moved out of her role as classroom teacher, and became the "collaborating teacher."

> My job description gets more concrete and less difficult to achieve. There was a model that was set forth. [In the proposal]. It was called the collaborative teacher. But that was not the model that I was working under because that model specifically limits

> you to working with four teachers and fifteen special needs children...as your maximum. Now my feeling was that you really needed to work with all the teachers who were involved, and a wider range of children because we have many, many children who, for one reason or another, could be listed, could be tested and found to be special needs children. We had a whole range of kids, and so it was not only the idea of taking kids who were in self-contained classes and desegregating them, for all the good reasons that that could bring about, but my basic underlying feeling was that if general education were changed enough, it could really be general. It's not really general. There's a very narrow spectrum of students that it can succeed with, and that spectrum is growing ever narrower as we have a more and more diverse population, and that that spectrum really needed to be broadened out, so I saw it as my role to work with teachers to help to broaden that. And basically, I wanted to be in the classroom with teachers, team teaching, doing lessons in areas where they felt they, perhaps, wanted to see a model of one way to do it, not the way. Taking over the class, so that they could go and observe another classroom, and working with teachers on how to modify curriculum so that it reached a greater number of kids in the class, so it'd be more accessible. That was my vague, general, overriding idea.
>
> The problem with it came that, first of all, public school teachers are so used to working in isolation, and they've been so used to doing it for so long, and even people who are new to the system very quickly acclimate to being alone. So that having another adult in the classroom is, is upsetting, distressing, threatening, you know, lots of different adjectives, for lots of different reasons. And so, my being in the classroom, even though I saw it as something that was supposed to be helpful, could be seen and was seen by some people, and not because they had any dislike of me, or distrust, it wasn't anything personal. They just were not comfortable. It was not something they were used to, and they had to become used to it.

Teachers resisted Gina's attempts to collaborate, and considered her role as one of direct service to the special ed students. They were very willing for her to work with the children, preferably as a pullout, but there was no forum for the kinds of rethinking of the curriculum and instructional planning that Gina had envisioned.

A problem that arose quickly stemmed from Gina's visibility as a person outside the classroom, who was perceived as available for a variety of administrative tasks. Her day began

to fill with things, from ordering supplies to managing buses to planning workshops to locating materials. When the teachers seemed reluctant to share their classrooms with her, Gina used that time in her own room to take care of such administrative jobs. In order to help the classroom teachers fill out IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) forms, she developed a checklist of grade - appropriate objectives culled from the book of computer-generated items. In this time period, the special education supervisor's case load was increased, so that he had less time to spend at the school. It seemed natural for Gina to perform some of the tasks that were previously left to him. By the second year, the fourth grade classes were added to her responsibilities, with nothing taken away. In the third year, the fifth grade was added, and Gina began to feel like a rubber band stretched beyond capacity. She describes her job at this point as like trying to build a wall, while also trying to plug the leaks that keep springing up. The wall, as Gina tells it, is an attempt to build something that will keep back the flood of "public school culture".

> I think the culture in the public school is that asking a question means that you're showing you don't know something. And to show you don't know something really exposes you, because then, it's because either you weren't trained well in your previous schooling, your teacher ed college, or because you haven't taken enough workshops....It's not seen as normal for people to ask questions, and not to know, and to be constantly growing and changing. Despite what all the literature says, and despite what all the initiatives are out there, the public school culture is one of : You come in, you're supposed to know what you're doing, and you go ahead and you do it .

Although some teachers, particularly the newer teachers, are beginning to feel comfortable with Gina in the room, she has not managed to break through that wall of distrust that she attributes to public school. When she does go into a classroom, her role tends to be the more familiar one of direct support to children, so that she is likely to work with a reading group in the back of the room, or to pull a group out into her own room.

While acknowledging that change takes place slowly, and trying to be patient with this process, Gina is often frustrated by its slow pace, and uncertain how to move it along. She describes herself as a person who sees a problem, and immediately tries to imagine how things can be done better. Often her energy, or her impatience, lead her to jump in and work on the problem intensively: go home and write the schoolwide plan, or a proposal for a planning grant, or material for a staff development session. On one occasion, I arrived in the school after a staff development retreat. There were reports from various committees displayed on the office bulletin board, each full of interesting ideas about cooperative learning, inclusive education, integrated curriculum, etc.. All of the reports, however, had been written by Gina. In some sense, she has accepted this as a reality of the public schools, comparing this school primarily with her private school history. She keeps plugging new leaks in the wall caused by resistance to change and lack of trust; at the same time, she keeps adding to the wall, trying to make it higher and stronger.

Martha: Going For the Gold

Martha Wallace describes herself as a foot soldier in the school, saying, "You do what you're told and try to make it work out." She began her teaching career idealistically. As she tells it, with a rueful smile,

> "They were beautiful little kids, and my first experience with a class. I envisioned every single one of them, boy and girl, growing up to be president of the United States. Wow! That was when I was 20. A long time ago. I don't have that vision any more but I still want to see them do more than what they think is available to them."

Martha would like her kids to feel that they can aspire to "bigger and better things, to understand the value of an education." She would like them to know about the different levels of jobs, and how important it is to go as far as you can in life. She says she would like to build their sense of self-worth, that they are "not limited by the block on which they live.: At the same time, she talks about her own career choice in, at best, ambivalent terms.

> It's a very easy rut. I'm a person who does not like change. I fall into ruts very easily and this was the perfect rut. After a while you have so much invested. Then I married, had two kids, summers off with the kids, holidays with the kids, then you have all the money and the time invested in the pension and the TDA. There comes a point where you can't really turn back.

Each day has a set schedule, with a fixed amount of time available for each content area. Within that time period, Martha has a fixed amount of curriculum to cover, as determined by her curriculum calendar and her own sense of how much she needs to work on. There may be a particular chapter of an English textbook, or a math page, or a language arts activity. Almost invariably, however, there is only one thing going on at a time. In general, the activity is expected to be completed in one session, with the possibility of an extension into homework. Any deviations from the schedule, however, must be weighed against the need to complete the activity or pages assigned for the day. There is much to be done, and allowing an activity to run into the next day means that something else is likely to be left out.

A child who cannot participate in the class activity, therefore, tends to sit and watch, or find some way to busy herself. Whenever possible, Martha will try to give that child something to do, but this usually means that the rest of the class must sit and wait.

Sound Hunt

The class was quiet. Martha told them to work on a story they had written, checking it over for things that needed changing. Most of the children were bent over their papers. Rosemary raised her hand. When Martha walked over to her, she pointed to a sign in the back

and said, "There's a T." Martha looked at the sign for a minute, then said, "Oh, you're right, there is a T....What about F? Can you find a word that begins with F?"

As Rosemary looked, several of the children quietly began to participate, finding words along with her. Curtis, Joanna, Latisha and Joe looked around the room at the walls. Curtis pointed his pencil as he looked. He smiled at Joe and some of the other children.

" Can you find something that begins with S?" Rosemary looked around and found a picture with the word "sun". "S" she said loudly. Martha said, "That's right. Sun begins with S. Can you find more?"

As Martha went around the class, bending over individual children to look at their work ,speaking in a low voice, Rosemary got up and walked toward the back of the room. She scanned the posters and books closely, saying "S" with a big smile whenever she found one. When she came to the bookcase behind me, I heard her first count the "S"s on the bulletin board. She found seven. Then she pulled a book about Santa from the bookcase and showed it to me, saying "S!" I asked her what the S was for, and she smiled and said, "Santa Claus!" She then pointed to several books, finding the S in the titles and repeating it, looking at me each time. I said, "Yes, that's an S" and sometimes said the name of the picture or word. After about ten minutes, Martha called back to her, "Rosemary, did you find anything that begins with S?" Rosemary showed her some of the S's. Martha said, "Oh, you found the letters. I thought you were finding things that begin with S." Rosemary pulled out a book that had the word Sun in the title. Martha said, "That's good, Rosemary. S is for sun."

While she was speaking, Vanessa came back and pointed to the word "special" on a chart, saying "S is for special." She looked at Martha with a smile perhaps wanting some of the special approval Rosemary was getting. Martha nodded, but kept looking at Rosemary. Vanessa sat down.

Clearly, this did not fit easily into the flow of Martha's teaching. The activity offered to Rosemary, whatever its educational value for her was separate from the work of the class, and external to it. Rosemary's presence as a student tended to add a layer of pressure to Martha's classroom orchestration. The adaptations Martha makes for students like Rosemary had little to do with the material that Martha feels she must cover in a prescribed time, and so they tend to slow her, and the class, down. Martha often feels guilty about not giving Rosemary or Nadira more time, but cannot afford it.

Martha *can* change the sequence of activity, especially in areas such as social studies, according to her interpretation of the children's needs and interests. Sometimes this means she can skip around, pick a topic the children are likely to be interested in. At other times, it means

that she will stop what is going on completely, switching to something else if she feels it isn't working.

> "When the kids are not focusing, not getting it, I stop. If I'm going to be talking to the walls, it's a waste of everybody's time, so I stop. I'll do something else - go to a different subject. If it's later in the day, we'll just get everything out of the way, do an art project. I'll read a story to them. I just have to switch. If they're not getting it, it's a waste of time. I'll try it again some other time."

Either the whole lesson works, or it doesn't. Perhaps it will work another time. There is little room in Martha's world for modifying curriculum, which is designed and written by authorities. Martha can pick and choose from their offerings, but not rewrite their expertise. While writing IEPs could offer Martha the chance to experience setting and reaching manageable goals, this is done for her by Gina, who brings in a list of third grade objectives. Martha selects from among these, and sends the forms back. She chooses goals for all of the children in her class, including reading goals for those who are not in her reading class. "It's like a wish list, like a Sears catalogue. I mean it's nice to say that 50% of the time he will be able to add two digit numbers with exchanging. I don't know that it's going to happen. "

The arrangement of furniture is a classic one, with the rows of faces pointed at the teacher. Martha has adapted it somewhat, by pushing Jamal and Joe outside of the formation. The "walkabout" arrangement allows Martha to spend some individual time with each child, making the reduced class size of the inclusion model a critical feature. In fact, it was this feature that convinced her to approve of the restructuring. She decided that the children from special ed were not so very different from those currently in her class, describing the referral process as a "crap shoot." Inclusion is supposed to make it easier for her to do the job she would like to do.

This has not occurred, however. She describes most of the children as increasingly unfocused, as just *not* understanding.

> Here they listen to me, because you have to listen to the teacher, but I don't know how much of it they internalize. But occasionally, there is a really bright kid who really is sharp and understands. Even if you reach just the one or two kids, so that they notice something out there that they can aspire to . . . You know, go for the gold ring.

Teaching in Martha's class is a chancy business. She rarely talks about changing instructional strategies, materials, or forms of a lesson. The lessons tend to be fixed, drawn from textbooks, teacher's guides, or Martha's past formal experience; while they are planned meticulously, they are usually not to be tinkered with. Either the children get it, or they do not. The author(s) of these lessons, then, have a particular power in this class, as they determine which knowledge is worth pursuing, which questions are worth answering, and which are a waste of time.

Weekly Reader: Teaching Geese to Fly

Martha announces that there will be no streaming today, and that the class will work on the Weekly Reader, a 4-page periodical for children that contains a variety of feature stories from the news. Jamal practically falls over backwards in his chair, stage-whispering "YESSSS!" while thrusting a fist into the air. He turns to grin at Paul, Jason, and Joe.

The children take turns reading the cover story, "Father Goose". It tells of a man who raises a flock of geese, who "imprint" on him as their parent. When the time comes for them to migrate, he builds a kind of glider and leads them. This allows him to influence their migration patterns, and has implications for helping future flocks migrate to safer, more life-supporting areas.

After the reading, Martha begins to ask comprehension questions. "Morris, what was the first thing the geese saw when they hatched?"

Morris stares in front of him for a moment, then tries to read the first sentence. Martha interrupts, repeating her question. Morris again tries to read. Several hands shoot up, and Irwin answers, "The researcher. Father Goose."

Martha asks, "Why did he do this?" She hopes they will be able to go to the final paragraph, which tells of the importance of the project for the future retraining of migration patterns. Again, several hands fly up.

Curtis responds first. "So they wouldn't starve."

Martha turns to the rest of the class. "But what was the real reason?"

Jamal leans forward over the back of his chair, waving his hand as far out as he can reach. When Martha acknowledges him, he shouts, "Cause he always dreamed of flying with the birds.!" This also comes from an early paragraph.

Martha throws up her hands in frustration. "They don't get it. They just don't get it!" She smiles ruefully and says, as if to the air, "Do we all know where we are, and why?

Brandon, who has been shuffling papers under his desk, looks up and ventures, "Because God made us."

Martha speaks positively about Gina's role, although she defines it somewhat differently.

> Gina was really most helpful, especially with the kids like mine who had a history here. There was paperwork on them and so on and people knew them. She was a wealth of information, and she would come in upon request and do a whole group lesson, but geared to the, the needs of the MIS 1 kids. Because, whatever she did, it couldn't hurt the other kids either to have things broken down into smaller tasks and so on.
>
> She's been our main source of, or MY main source of information on how to deal with the children and how to try to work with them. That was her job description when this was all developed. And she would be a coordinator, facilitator to help the teachers with these kids.
>
> She took them out for small reading groups because she had all the kinds of materials that Beth uses. She had a wealth of teacher-made stuff that she was able to use with the children and the reading group. She did a combination of structured things and more flexible things, according to what the needs were in a particular classroom, or the particular student.

Gina is, for Martha, an expert on call, someone who can come in to fix particular situations, but who is responsible directly to the MIS I kids. She appears to have enough expertise (or "training"-, as Martha calls it) to adapt the curriculum. The purpose of this is for the special ed kids, although it "can't hurt" the others. At no time does Martha refer to Gina as a collaborator or peer; the "teacher-made stuff" that she brings is evidence, for Martha, of knowledge and ability that is outside of Martha's "untrained" grasp.

Beth: Connection vs. Isolation

Beth was the teacher of the youngest special education class. Her prior experience in this school was as a member of a tightly knit special education unit, in which teachers were involved in one another's lives.

> My kids were with me at the youngest level, then passed on to Gina, then passed on to Rose. So if there was anything happening in my class, Gina was interested because she was getting them. And then when she had them the next year, she could come to me and say, 'What about this kid? Did he do this? Did she do that? And what do you think about it? There was more of a camaraderie in that, their being passed between the three of us and not just moving on. We planned some things together, like parties.

The teachers in this unit had the freedom to plan their curriculum according to the goals that were set for particular children. Beth's curriculum derived from her understanding of how people learn, a topic that interests her a great deal.

> I had a global idea of the curriculum but I looked more to the child. This is how far they should go, and take the next steps. I wouldn't think of it in terms of second grade, third grade, fourth grade - I got do this much in here - but where are they now? and they should be someplace else at the end of the year. Everything was geared more to the child. I feel regular ed is more like, "This is a year. You must do this, whether it makes sense for the kid or not." What these kids are actually doing doesn't matter.

Studying Cells

When the class was back in their seats after reading, they began a discussion of cells, continuing a conversation they had had the day before. Beth asked questions as the children raised their hands to answer, naming the parts of a cell and their functions. Derrick asked what it's called when cells eat other cells. Beth stopped for a moment in surprise, said, "What a good question!" and began to talk about cancer. Lissette raised her hand to tell about a relative who had had cancer, and several hands went up. Other children offered stories about people with cancer.

Beth held up a large piece of drawing paper that was divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant contained a colorful marker drawing of: an animal cell, a plant cell, how cells reproduce, and types of human cells. Beth went over each drawing, asking children to identify what was in it and what it was for. She then gave them each a piece of similar paper and showed them how to fold it in half, and half again. She asked them what fraction this made. Anthony tried, "Fours". No one gave the answer so Beth said, "FourTHs" (emphasizing the "ths" sound.) She then told the class to make the same four drawings on their paper. They could do it in their

own way, and did not have to stick with her colors. On the board, she wrote the name of each drawing, and the page on which it could be found in the science textbook. The children spread out around the room, on tables, on the floor, at the round table. Some used the textbook, some walked repeatedly up to Beth's model, which she taped onto the board. As they worked, Beth walked around, talking with each child about what they were drawing and what they could say about it.

Emilia began a simple copy of the animal cell outline. When Beth asked her what she was drawing, she stood silently and looked at her. Beth said, "These are cells'" and asked Emilia to repeat it. She did, but when Beth came back and asked a few minutes later, Emilia was silent again. Beth took her by the hand and went to the table behind the pumpkins. She told Emilia to sit down, and walked to the front of the room to get out a microscope and a set of prepared slides. She showed them to Emilia, and talked with her about what each slide was.

Deborah and Eddie worked together. Eddie had drawn cell reproduction on his paper, and was now drawing the outlines on Deborah's. She said, "He's helping me," and showed me the large cell outlines he had done for the animal and plant cells. I helped her find the human cell illustration in the text, and she attempted to draw them. Eddie looked into my face and said, "What are you?" I explained that I was a researcher from NYU, wanting to learn about their classroom. He nodded and went on drawing.

Beth was working with Dwayne at the microscope. As several children asked for help, she said that some of the children were finishing their drawings, and would then become helpers for the others. Dwayne was finished, as well as Jermaine and Michael. "You can ask any of them for help. Eddie will be finished soon, and then you can ask him." As Beth got up to make the rounds of the room, she said that some children had been trained in using the microscope, and were going to teach other children. The system was that one child finished looking at the slides, and then helped a new child with it.

David and Derrick came back from Resource Room. Beth told them what to do. David began to draw immediately, while Derrick wandered the room for a bit before getting started.

At about 12:15, Beth began collecting the papers. She said that everyone should hand theirs in, finished or not. There would be time to work on them on Monday, so that they could be hung up for Parents Night on Monday night. She told everyone to make sure that their first and last name was on the drawings. When she had the entire pile, Beth sat at her desk and held each one up, one at a time. She read the name on the paper, commented on what was interesting, what had been done well, and what the person needed to work on. She then called each table to get their coats and get on line.

Derrick took a long time getting his coat. Beth asked me to walk down with him. She gave me her keys to the coat closet, and said that Derrick could return them to her. While he was putting on his coat, Derrick asked me what I was doing there. I told him the same thing I had told Eddie. He said, smiling, "You want to learn about my class?" I said yes. I thought it was an interesting class.

Derrick said, "She teaches us much more than we have to know." I asked what he thought about that. He said, "We learn things like from college. I even know about ***multicellular*** *stuff." There was pride in his face and voice as he talked, especially on the word "multicellular." I said, "You really seem to be learning a lot. He nodded, and we walked downstairs to Beth.*

Furniture arrangements changed, sometimes several times a day, according to what was going on. There was lots of interaction in the room, with children helping one another. Involvement in one another's progress was regular and expected. Beth was prepared to shift what she was doing in order to connect the work to the children, as in the cancer discussion. She was constantly creating and revising her curriculum according to her own understanding of what was needed. It was usual for four or five things to be going on at once.

This brought Beth into sharp conflict with the regular education calendar of instruction, which specified the skills to be taught and their sequence.. The regular weekly grade meetings were given over to "training" in a phonics program to be used by all the reading classes (except for Martha, who taught the group that was reading on grade level, and was therefore "allowed" to use her old basal reader. She was still required, however, to attend all the training. She usually sat at a separate table from the others, watching and silent.) Beth used the program over her own objections for a semester, then she rebelled. The program used too many small parts that were hard to keep track of in Beth's busy classroom, but most of it all, it bored Beth. She could see the children reflecting her boredom. They were begging for stories. Beth made a decision over vacation, and began to teach reading her own way. She still went to the meetings, was still given program materials, but she returned to her own eclectic methods, and began to enjoy reading again.

This could have helped Beth to feel better about her move to regular education. She was successful with the children, her success was acknowledged, and she could make her own teaching decisions. Beth was still not happy, however. Much of her reason for teaching arose from her desire for social and professional involvement with her colleagues, and for "personal intimacy" with the children. That connection with her students, the feeling that she knew each of

them well and could relate material to their experiences, their home and family life, was disrupted by the reading "streaming" which moved third and fourth graders around to different teachers for ninety minutes (plus about twenty minutes transition time) each day, four days a week. Beth no longer had that information about many of her reading students, and she hated to send her own students out of the classroom community so much.

Beth's involvement with her colleagues was even more disrupted by her insistence on autonomy in the classroom. The principal tolerated her departure from the mandated curricula because of her undisputed success; children in Beth's class performed well, and scored better on standardized tests than most other classes in the school. She was not, however, free to share her ideas with other teachers, who were not given the same tacit permissions. In fact, teachers who adopted her ideas had gotten "in trouble" on a few occasions.

> I don't mind sharing ideas. I want to give my ideas, but at the same time, I have to know that everything I say is completely punishment-free. In other words, I am afraid to share, because I think that maybe it would get somebody in trouble, that maybe they're not supposed to be doing it, that maybe they let me do it but not somebody else. I need immunity.
>
> If I say what I did, then they say, " Really? You mean you *didn't* do the Critical Thinking book?" So I don't like to share, cause I know what my secret is.
>
> I did not do the test booklets in February. Everybody was doing them every Friday like they were told. And I did not do it. When did I do it? A few weeks before the test, after I had taught measurement, and other skills they needed. How can I do those booklets, when I'm deep into teaching? So now, somebody will say, "Are you doing the test booklet? What chapter are you up to?" I want to close the door and say, "I don't know!" I can't answer! And then someone says, "My God, where are you in math?" I can't answer that because I may not be where I'm supposed to be in math. I cannot answer, "What are you doing in social studies?" "Well, I'm not doing exactly what the curriculum tells me to do. I'm doing something different." Because that's what *they* are teaching. So now I have to hide it. If they're all told that they have to do these four countries, then that's the curriculum of social studies. Meanwhile the kids don't know anything about the

> community. I think I have the best social studies program! I could market my social studies program.

Beth has bought her autonomy at the cost of collegiality. She has come to seem stand-offish to the new teachers, who don't understand her unwillingness to help them. Beth is becoming increasingly isolated, eating lunch in her classroom, visited sometimes by Martha, Gina, and the science teacher, but missing the close community that her old special ed unit had offered. There is a large steel door to her classroom that is usually closed while she is teaching, to keep out the steady press of "interruptions" that have plagued her since joining regular education. She feels constant pressure to make her teaching more fragmented, more rushed, less personal. Although she still feels strongly about the need for the children in special education to be integrated, and she still wants very much to feel part of a professional community, she is becoming alienated and alone.

When Meanings Intersect

One way to think about how understandings are socially constructed is to look at the patterns and gaps in the way participating teachers approach their work together. I will compare the stories of Gina and Beth, Gina and Martha, then Martha and Beth, looking for overlap or discrepancy in their views of their shared professional work.

Gina and Beth

It would seem that these two teachers would be natural allies. There are several common threads in their stories. Each was a member of the same close-knit special education unit, and they had a history of working together well. Both entered into the restructuring because of their belief in integration, although Gina's focus was on the children's academic needs, while Beth was more concerned about social isolation. Each of them, however, saw the problem as one they

could do something about. Each felt willing and able to initiate activity that will move them toward their goals, to act powerfully, at least to some degree.

It is interesting that, while both of them talked at length about the proposed inclusion plan, each had a very different image of how it would work. Gina planned always to work within existing grade structures. Her original idea called for smaller classes (fifteen students) than were actually established (twenty, at the time of my study). She also wished to work with no more than four classes, and had hoped to be able to collaborate and move away from the traditional curriculum more than she managed to do. The basic structure of the model, however, was the one implemented.

Beth, on the other hand, had a different assumption.

> I actually had a much freer model in my mind. I thought that we were going to evaluate children and put them on their skill level. Even the regular ed. And I thought everybody would work like a special ed teacher, be more skills and task oriented rather than just have a curriculum-based teaching. "Johnny can do this, therefore he can proceed to this and this." I thought each of us would look at a smaller piece and therefore get more done that way. And I thought that they would be allowed to progress from teacher to teacher, like if I had the lower level, if I had first grade work, if Johnny was able to accomplish this and was doing well, why even wait for the end of the school year, let them go ahead. That's what I thought we were doing.

Beth did not feel bound by the structures already in place, when she felt that they did not meet the needs of the children. Unlike Gina, she assumed that it would be possible and desirable to rework them as long as they were restructuring. Their assumptions remained tacit however; no one talked through these issues, so that Beth did not realize the discrepancy until the model was put into place.

Both Beth and Gina are concerned about the problem of the placement of children from special education into the school. Currently, children are referred from their home schools in the

district for a MIS I (special class) placement. Parents are sent a letter offering a place at Lincoln, but without describing the inclusion structure. While parents have the option to visit and accept or refuse the placement, many simply sign the form and send their child, without ever learning what it involves. The school has worked to get in touch with parents and explain the model before the children arrive, but this is not always possible. Gina and Beth would like to set up a school-level screening process, in which teachers from the school would spend time with the child and family, before accepting the child into the class. Beth feels that placement decisions need to be made by people who know the child very well, *and* who know the receiving teacher very well. Gina would like to add an opportunity to visit the children in their previous classes, and speak with their teachers, before suggesting this school as a placement. Both feel strongly about all people who have a stake in the outcomes being involved in the decision, and are confident of their own right to be included.

In their personal histories, Gina and Beth have each made at least one major career change as they perceived their personal needs were not being met where they were. Gina moved from private to public school, and from regular to special education. Beth moved from a position as an art teacher in a Catholic school, where she felt used and undervalued, into special education, where she's been in two different schools. At the time my research ended, Gina was planning a sabbatical year to renew her own energies, and Beth was deciding whether to remain in regular education.

Gina and Martha

Gina and Martha seem to agree on the usefulness of some kind of help in Martha's classroom. Gina's presence, however, has been complicated by Martha's use of time in the

classroom. One thing goes on at a time. Either Martha is speaking, or someone else is speaking. If Gina is teaching, then Martha is not; if Martha is teaching, then Gina is not. The exception to this occurs when someone comes in to give direct service to a group of children. When Gina comes in, her offer to work with Martha may be not so much *resisted* as *re-translated*. Martha interprets the idea according to what she has known in the past. A math paraprofessional teaches a group in the back of the room during math time. Gina is welcome to do so with the MIS I children, or to teach a class lesson geared to their needs. ("It can't hurt the others.) Martha has no experience of the kind of collaboration on equal footing that Gina would like to do.

One of the obstacles to Martha's learning about such collaboration lies in her view of curriculum, which is not invented by teachers such as herself. Martha's understanding of her job is that of a "foot soldier", who carries out the directives of others. There is some room for making the best of a difficult situation, but the actual invention of curriculum occurs somewhere else. Repeatedly, in her lessons with the children as well as in her descriptions of her own teaching history, Martha has shown a distrust of direct observation and experience. Children's observations in science must be translated into formal language before they can be considered "learning". Their stories, in which they relate the discussion to that they already know, are a waste of time, except as motivators. Martha seems equally unwilling to trust her own sense of what the children might need, preferring to defer to the judgments of experts.
Gina's long-term goal, therefore, to wean teachers from dependency on textbooks, may be in direct conflict with Martha's understanding of how she can work productively with children.

A vivid example of this emerges in Martha's response to Gina's idea of a school-based screening of new children. Martha, who worries about the "misplacement" of children in her class, thinks this would be an important step in eliminating the problem. She has no wish,

however, to participate in the decisions about admission to her class. Martha feels she would not know what to look for, to assess who might do well in her particular classroom, and prefers to leave this to those who are "expert in that kind of thing." Her thirty years of experience have not given her the sense that she knows her classroom, and its demands, better than someone (such as Gina and Beth) whose training counts for more than their ignorance of her classroom.

In order to help Martha with the MIS I children, Gina has tried to reduce the extra burden of working under special education regulations. She has therefore taken on much of the drudgery of writing IEPs for Martha. The district uses a computerized system, in which the teacher searches through books full of objectives in various categories, identifying the appropriate ones by number. Gina has gone through these, and selected a list that seem most appropriate for third grade. Martha then chooses from this list. As described above, Martha sees the list as out of reach for the children in her class.

In attempting to make this process easier, Gina may be missing an important opportunity to help Martha feel more powerful in her work with these children. The process of looking at the child, choosing simple goals that represent real "next steps" and feel "do-able" to Martha, could begin to develop a sense of efficacy that is sorely needed. Instead, the effect of the help is to lift the responsibility for this kind of thinking from Martha to Gina. The goals Gina gives her seem to be a mere "wish list" as Martha has no idea how to accomplish them. It can implicitly suggest that Gina would be able to accomplish them, probably because of her "training". Martha's sense of confidence in her ability to affect the children's learning is greatly reduced. She is inadvertently being helped to powerlessness.

Martha and Beth

Martha's furniture remains in a fixed position, with a very occasional change for group work in science. (I observed this change twice in the time that I was there.) Her room is sunny and neatly, although sparsely, decorated The desks in Beth's room, generally organized into four-person tables, are moved around freely according to the activity. Her room is full -to - bursting with charts, books, poems, lists, work samples, and objects of all kinds.

Martha's lessons tend to begin and end precisely, and her class is always on time for lunch and dismissal. She covers the material required by the instructional calendar, generally at the time specified. Beth's lessons flow into one another, with children moving to the next activity as they finish the previous one. It is usual for her class to be ten or fifteen minutes late for lunch and dismissal; they may leave an activity in the middle and return to it when they come back. She may also allow a good discussion, in science, for example, to run through the time allotted for another subject without worrying, saying she'll get it all done in the end.

Beth and Martha hold different views of their role as teacher. Beth starts by looking at the child, and figuring out what is needed from there. She sees herself as a scientist, always observing and inquiring into how people learn. She organizes her teaching according to what she finds. Beth doesn't agree with the prescribed sequence of topics and skills, and is willing to rearrange it, or depart from it altogether. Her teaching must make sense, to her and to the children, and it must be connected to other things the children know The teacher, in her view, is learning and constructing knowledge with the children, is constantly drawing on her own experiences to help the children learn to do the same with their own.

Martha describes herself as a "foot soldier" who has seen a variety of mandates come and go, and must try to "make it work" as best she can. Her task is to get the children as close to grade level in each curriculum area as she can. Martha seems to see the knowledge in the textbooks as valuable in itself, as holding the power to lift the children out of the limitations of their lives and offer them a chance to become somebody important in the future. She is frustrated because the children don't tend to see this, and to find their education valuable. The teacher, in her view, exposes the children to the things they need to know as educated people, moves them upward through the curriculum levels. Instead of bringing in their life experiences, they should be learning to transcend those experiences, to move on and up toward something better.

Martha has some difficulty applying this view of education to herself. While Beth has changed jobs more than once, according to how well a job was meeting her needs, Martha feels that changing would be too disruptive, even if she is not exactly happy. She describes teaching as "the perfect rut," and seems to feel trapped in it.

Sometimes the two of them can see the same phenomenon, and interpret it quite differently. Martha, for example, sees the wealth of :teacher-made" materials used by both Gina and Beth, and attributes this ability to their special education training. Not having such training, she is not able to produce anything comparable and must rely on their suggestions and ideas. Beth, however, claims that her "special ed" background did not help her, that she has actively discarded most of it for her own experience, observations and judgments. The one place where it has been useful, oddly enough, lay in the fact that special classes were often the last to get books and supplies. Learning to make their own materials became a matter of survival, for there was often no other source.

While Martha and Beth, and often Gina, often eat lunch together, they rarely discuss these issues. Beth, as described above, actively avoids such conversations for fear of reprisals. It might be possible for Beth to demystify some of the success she's had with children by describing the choices she makes; without this, Martha is left to believe that it's a matter of training and expertise that is beyond her reach. Without it, Beth is left isolated, hungry for professional conversations with people who understand "how it is." Without it, Gina has difficulty opening the collaborative conversations that would move her role forward, and is left believing only that "change happens very slowly."

Sensemaking and Inclusion

Gina, Martha, and Beth each participated in a process called inclusion, yet they each entered into something somewhat different. Martha joined an initiative intended to reduce class size, hoping that this would allow her to pay more individual attention to children and become more effective. She expected the MIS I children who entered her class to be little different from the children she was already seeing, although she expected a vast difference between her own expertise and that of the teachers :"trained" to teach them. Beth joined an initiative that would integrate her children, and herself, more fully into the life of the whole school. She expected to continue making her own decisions about what she would teach, and when. Gina joined an initiative meant to reform the delivery of service to children with special needs, in her own school and possibly in the larger domain of public schools. She expected that the change process would be slow, but that she could move steadily toward new collaborative roles, and toward reshaping classroom practice to reflect current research about engaging, active learning.

Theresa Monroe, the principal of Lincoln, emphasizes the importance of the teaching staff's collective support of the restructuring. In fact, her statement, that the special ed teachers

couldn't even conceive of returning to the old format, came a day after Beth said she didn't think she could last much longer. Theresa praised her staff for being willing to try things, for being open to what she would like to do. She described the support being given to the teachers: training in the phonics program (at every grade conference this year. This is the meeting where Martha was inclined to sit a table away, watching something that had no relationship to their teaching.) There is also an after-school workshop that Martha, Beth, and Gina were attending in a program designed to replace the social studies textbook with literature. Support seemed to be perceived as "training" in specific curriculum materials that would be used in a synchronized fashion by the teachers on a grade. There was no provision for conversations about individual teaching practice, or about what teachers were seeing in the children. If anything, such conversations seemed to be discouraged by the strong emphasis on consensus.

"Streaming," the sorting of children in the third and fourth grade into smaller ability groups throughout the school for ninety minutes a day, was also mentioned as a support for the teachers. In Theresa's words, "They only have to prepare one reading lesson for the group. It's less work, and they love it." At a half day staff development conference, however, teachers were asked to identify problems in the school. Teachers in the group I attended, including Martha and Beth, voted unanimously to get rid of streaming. They found it unwieldy, time wasting, and difficult to come to know so many additional children, while they lost information about the children they had. The idea of one lesson for the group was not so practical, as they found the children's needs were still too diverse. The recommendation was noted (along with a recommendation to get rid of the instructional calendar), filed and forgotten, because the teachers really did not have the power to make such a decision. In the name of participation and teacher involvement, the teachers' powerlessness was vividly enforced.

Beth's silencing has been described. The greater her personal success, the more isolated her voice becomes. At some point, she will either join the group or , more likely, remove herself completely. Martha's silencing is being achieved as there is less and less of a point to speaking. The things that trouble her about reaching the children seem inevitable, and nameless. Gina is being stretched thinner and thinner, and moved further from the classroom realities of the teachers, until her voice, too, can barely be heard. Only the "official voice", the consensus that everyone seems to share but no one enacts, is audible.

Is this inevitable? The teachers still want inclusion to work. One wonders what would happen if a new kind of support were introduced, a forum for actual discussions of classroom practice, *and* of alternatives. What if teachers, including Beth, could talk about what they actually do in the classroom, and how the children respond? What if they were to consider different ways of working? What if they actually looked at various room arrangements, sequences, and materials, instead of one mandated curriculum? What if they talked about what they were actually trying to accomplish in their classes, their own goals and dreams, and listened to the different ways people think about this? What if the conversation actually centered on *teaching* and *learning*?

Gina could play a pivotal role in this process. At the moment, however, she is struggling with the problem of creating a new role in a school that has worked differently for a long time. There is a strong tendency to recast her role into something more familiar, and to interact with her accordingly. She will need to define her role carefully; she needs not only to perform new tasks, but to create a space where nothing was before. That space will need strong boundaries, especially in the beginning, to keep it from being devoured by the familiar, by what she sees as "public school culture." While change may indeed be slow, it will only move in the direction

she wants if she looks at what is in the way, and takes some steps to deal with it. Her direction needs to be grounded, not just in her vision, but in the understandings, the thoughts and struggles of the actual teachers she is working with. In this effort, she will need Theresa to help her define the space, to create a safe space for teachers to talk about what is actually going on, to risk disagreement and conflict. It remains to be seen whether people are willing to take that chance. Wouldn't it be interesting, as we move toward creating inclusive environments for an increasing variety of children, to try to create them for their teachers as well?

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